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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study examined the effectiveness of the combination of autobiography, biography, and cross-cultural analyses in the context of preservice teacher education. Subjects were 21 preservice teachers at a rural Midwestern public university in which only 9% of the 11,000 students were from minority backgrounds. Subjects, for a class assignment, wrote their autobiographies, then wrote a biography of a first-generation immigrant after conducting in-depth interviews with the person, and then made a cross-cultural analysis comparing the two different life histories. A constant comparison method was used to conduct textual analyses of each student's biography, autobiography, and cross-cultural analysis. Results indicated that the preservice teachers: (1) discovered their own "cultural lenses"; (2) discovered similarities in human experiences; (3) discovered and respected cultural differences; (4) understood the problems faced by new immigrants; (5) empathized with immigrants' problems; (6) overcame their fear of noncommunication; (7) strengthened their personal beliefs; and (8) visualized strategies to use in their classrooms and with immigrant parents. Findings suggest that the combination of autobiography, biography, and cross cultural study moved participants beyond the past and present to visualize and construct the future experiences for their personal and professional lives. Future research could explore the long-term impact of the strategy on participants after they enter the teaching profession. (Contains 45 references.) (RS)

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Making Connections with First-generation Immigrants: A Cultural Literary Approach

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by

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Making connections with first generation immigrants: A cultural literacy approach

> I interviewed Betty, a twenty-six year old woman from Panama. She came to the Unites States six years ago with her American husband, an Air Force officer. The biggest difference I discovered between her and me is our experiences with "discrimination." She is discriminated against a lot more than I am. As a female in a male dominated society, I did experience some discriminations. Betty's biggest complaints are about her work place, Walmart super center: when people make fun of her accent, and when people label her as a certain culture.... Customers at work treat her rudely sometimes because of the way she talks.... She is in a whole new world without her family and a new baby on the way. I can relate to her when it comes to the separation issue from your family. I had really hard time leaving my family when I came to college.... Betty's separation is different than my though....a long way from home... in search of a new life in a new land. Unfortunately, all her hopes have been shattered now that she and her husband are in the process of a divorce. She is really worried about the custody battle and how that will turn out...in whose favor?....She is also worried about work and finding a baby-sitter. (Debby)

The above excerpt is drawn from Debby's (a Caucasian female student) comparative analysis of her own life experiences with that of Betty, a woman from Panama. Interviewing Betty, Debby learned about problems new immigrants face in America which come from many fronts; personal, financial, social, and institutional.

The problem is greater for those immigrants who do not have a degree from American schools and colleges and have limited English proficiency. Through Betty, Debby was able to perceive the commonalities of human experiences as well as question her taken-for granted privileges being a White and English speaking American citizen. Hopefully, it will aid to her preparation as teacher who will effectively connect to culturally different children and families.

This particular paper is based on a course assignment designed for elementary education students who were enrolled to the course, "World diversity and America" in a rural midwestern university. The assignment required students to write their autobiographies , then write a biography of a first generation immigrant after conducting in-depth interviews with the person, and finally make a crosss-cultural analysis comparing these two different life histories. The purpose of the project was to allow future students to perceive commonalities and differences in human experiences, understand and analyze the unique problems faced by new immigrants and their children as well as the possible challenges for teachers while dealing with children from this population, and formulate strategies to reach first-generation immigrant parents and children.

Review of Literature

This particular section focuses on philosophical, procedural, and methodological aspects related to the study as well as the uniqueness of this particular study.

Methodological Frameworks

The following postmodern movements in social science research have influenced the inception as well as the direction of this particular study: the post-structural and feminist movement (Beyer & Liston, 1992; Lather, 1992), interpretive inquiry (Erikson, 1986; Lincoln, 1989) and contemporary scholarly interest in narrative studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Elbaz, 1991). Despite their individual uniqueness, all the above perspectives join their voices against the scientific authority of positivism, as "one and the only best approach" to generate and validate knowledge about the world. Their legacies of multiple epistemologies and recognition of multiple perspectives as the bases for inquiry were adopted as methodological lenses for this study. Because of the fact that the study relies heavily on writing of autobiographies and biographies, it will be appropriate to discuss the problems and possibilities of narrative as a research methodology and the ways these concerns were addressed in this study.

Narrative as a Research Methodology: Problems and Possibilities

Writing of autobiographies/biographies fall into the category of narrative studies. Using narrative as a research methodology has drawn many intellectual and professional concerns (Stotsky, 1993). The possibilities of narrative research are many. Yet I will focus on the problems/concerns raised by social science and literacy researchers. Thomas (1992) writes, "narrative as a genre presents post-modernist problems, not least the relation of language to reality and what may count as evidence

or data" (p. introduction). In narrative studies, the potential threats to "rigor" (expected from any research methodology) come from two major fronts: the trustworthiness of the experiences told/written and the possible mis-interpretation of these experiences by the interpreter-researcher. In this particular study, the researcher made a conscious effort to ensure methodological rigor. Because of the fact that students' autobiographies reflected their own life experiences especially in an atmosphere of mutual trust (between the participant and the researcher) and privacy, the researcher perceives no threat to trustworthiness/validity in student-produced autobiographies in this study. Students' wrote the biographies of their interviewees based on the audio-taped recording of their interviews. The audio-tapes were submitted to the researcher for review. Interviewees read their own biographies written by students for possible mis-interpretations. Therefore, inter-rater reliability was ensured at every step of the study. Students were given the earlier drafts of this paper (pseudonyms for their individual names were provided) to check accuracy of the researcher's interpretations.

Multicultural Education: A Critical Analysis

Preservice teachers' multicultural literacy has ben a constant focus for teacher education programs in recent years to address the mismatch between the growing diversity of the public school classrooms and the monocultural preservice teachers in the college classrooms (Cazdan & Mehan, 1989; Hinchey, 1994). With full consensus to the preparation of multiculturally oriented future teachers, experts, however, debate over the strategies used to achieve this goal. For example, studies of different ethnic

group characteristics are criticized for perpetuating ethnic/cultural stereotypes; the focus on heroes, food, and festivals is criticized for fostering a "cultural tourism" approach in students (Banks, 1994; Lu, 1996), multicultural units and lesson plans are rejected as isolate segments without any relevance to the central curriculum (Hillis, 1993).

Cultural Autobiographies: A Different Approach to Study Culture

The failure of those above mentioned approaches in enhancing preservice teachers' understanding of ethnically diverse students and their families has led to an alternative approach that advocates to define and study cultures from an individual/personal perspective (Florio-Ruane, 1994). The proponents of this approach focus on "the development of one's own cultural identity as a necessary precursor to cross-cultural understanding" (Zeichner, 1993, p.15). Writing of autobiography is the primary focus of this particular approach. Using students' autobiography as a vehicle for personal and academic growth is not new in teaching. The implications of autobiographies has been recognized from many vantage points such as: enabling students to define themselves and their philosophies of life (Shull, 1991); validating and clarifying students' personal experiences (Nicolini, 1994); inducing individual and social self-consciousness among students (Kass, 1995); encouraging students to construct landscapes and personal meaning by connecting with community and place (Newman, 1995); helping students to construct their personal identity (Kehily, 1995); allowing minority students to connect with their

cultural backgrounds (Allison, 1995), and enabling classroom teachers to construct and reconstruct their personal practical knowledge (Beattie, 1995; Elbaz, 1992). The value of autobiographies in the context of cultural learning has recently been advocated by theorists and researchers (Florio-Ruane & de Tar, 1995; Schmidt, 1996). The underlying assumption of this approach is that "ethnicity" and "culture" will no longer be perceived as the study of "others." Here, the study of self creates a context to study and connect to the experiences of others.

ABC (Autobiography/Biography/Cross-Cultural Analysis: Constructing Self from the Other

Interviews and cross-cultural analyses has been advocated by Spindler & Spindler (1987). Combining autobiography with biography and cross-cultural analyses (ABC) in the context of preservice teachers' cultural understanding has been largely unexplored. The implications of the ABC approach is far-reaching. The understanding of meaning of culture and ethnicity from personal, sociopolitical, and cross-cultural perspective may transform our preservice teachers in many ways: disdain toward the unfamiliar (therefore undesirable) will be discarded (Pattnaik, 1997), fear of unknown will be dispelled (Kuwahara, 1995); abilities to see similarities within differences will be fostered (Kanpal, 1992); and a desire to explore a range of possibilities to communicate with culturally different children and parents will be nurtured (Green, 1993).

First-generation Immigrants: A Culture in Transition

The study focused on people who are recent immigrants because of the growing number of this particular population in the U. S. over the past decade. The new immigrants lack of knowledge of the mainstream culture accompanied with the mainstream culture's apathy to deal with the problems faced by the new immigrants affect the adaptation and accommodation of the new arrivals into the new social order. The result is manifested in poor academic achievement and high drop-out rates of the limited English proficiency children (Councils in the Great City Schools, 1995). Laosa (1989) suggested that variables such as characteristics of the communities of origin, the background of the child and the family, the challenges and constraints faced in the country of entrance, consideration of the person's life cycle at which immigration takes place should be considered while dealing with first generation immigrant families.

Owocki & Lohff (1995) suggest that the acculturation struggle of these children/families should not be viewed from the macrocultural ideals, rather from the immigrants' perspectives. Therefore, a major challenge exists in recruiting and training of teachers who are prepared to see different perspectives (Councils of the Great City schools, 1995). The importance of the use of autobiography and biography involving white preservice teachers and recent immigrants can be perceived in such a context. The cultural analysis resulted from writing autobiographies and biographies will enable preservice teachers to understand and empathize with new immigrants and develop strategies to connect with newly immigrated children and families.

Uniqueness of this Particular Study

This particular research study converges with studies based on the tradition of narrative research such as autobiographies and teacher stories (Florio-Ruane, 1994; Connelly & Clandinin, 1992). However, the study draws heavily from Schmidt's (1996) study of "autobiographies, interviews and cross-cultural analyses." The uniqueness of this particular study is its strategy of facilitating connection between white rural preservice teachers and the first generation immigrants, two most vulnerable groups, the former for its ignorance, lack of exposure, and accurate information as regards to cultural diversity (yet bears the responsibility to teach culturally diverse students) and the later for its ambiguous and problematic position in a new culture.

Method

The method of data collection and analysis followed the procedure of qualitative research. Therefore, no attempt was made to control and manipulate the relevant variables, rather naturalistic environment was maintained. This section describes the setting, participants, procedures, limitations of the study, and the data analysis.

Setting

The study took place in a rural Midwestern public university in the U. S. The university has a student population of over 11, 000 of which only 9% are from minority backgrounds and around 4% are international students. The university receives its student population from the neighboring farming communities and from the

city/suburbs of Kansas city and St. Louis. The university is only 55 miles away from the Kansas city and around 220 miles from St. Louis. The population of new immigrants is increasing in the city, in the suburbs, and also in the university town. Majority of the university's international students manage to find a job in these two neighboring cities or in other places of the U.S. after graduation and join the pool of new immigrants.

Participants

Participants for this study were of two different groups: the preservice teachers and the first generation immigrants.

(a) Preservice teachers: The preservice teachers enrolled to the course "World diversity and America" were required to complete the assignment "Autobiography and biography: Making connection with first generation immigrants." The course covers contents dealing with American pluralism as well as global perspectives. The course is a required course for elementary/early childhood education majors and an elective for non-education majors. However, out of 26 students enrolled for the course, only 3 were non-education majors. The sampling procedure was purposive because of my interest to gather the impact of writing one' own autobiography and biography of a newly immigrated person on prospective teachers understanding of new immigrants. Participation in the study was voluntary. However, except two, all the preservice teachers enrolled for the course participated in the study. The final sample consisted of 21 preservice teachers. The participants were in their junior years and were of

Caucasian heritage. Except two, all were female. Because of the personal aspects involved in writing one' autobiography, pseudonyms are used instead of real names of the participants.

The total sample consisted of 21 preservice teachers and 21 first generation immigrants.

(b) First generation immigrants: Each preservice teachers in the study interviewed one person who is a first-generation immigrant. These immigrants came to the U. S. through varieties of ways and with different purposes. Some of them come through marriage to an American citizen, some came through work permits, some others came as students and managed to find a job later, a few are currently students in the U. S. universities and are planning to reside in the U. S. if immigration rules permit, one came through adoption as an adolescent, and one fled from China after the Tinamen square incident. Their educational backgrounds varied so did their visa status. However, all of them hold a legal visa. This variation was allowed keeping in view the difficulty in locating and completing research with new immigrants who have the common characteristics (such as educational backgrounds, marital status or age of the immigrant , and reason for immigration including political dissents, war refugees, voluntary immigrants etc.) within the time range of a semester. The common thread among the participants in this category was their first-generation status or the recency of their experiences in the U. S. The final sample consisted of 21 first generation immigrants.

Data Source

The following data sources were used for the study.

a: Personal journal writings

b: Writing of autobiographies

c: Writing of biographies of a new immigrant/international student

d: Cross-cultural analysis

Procedure and Data Collection

Before the inception of the study, the researcher shared the purpose and procedure of the research and sought preservice teachers' willingness to participate in the study. Because, the assignment was required for all preservice teachers and fulfilled the requirement of partial grading for the course, therefore, difference between the completion of the assignment and the participation in the study was clarified. Participation in the study, as clarified by the researcher, meant giving permission to the researcher to use the data for presentation and publication.

The study proceeded through the following three phases:

Phase 1: In the first phase, students wrote some personal journal entries on topics such as "have I ever been discriminated against and how it felt" "reflecting on my own biases," "my experiences with a person who was different than me," "my views on immigration" which culminated in an in-depth writing of autobiography. The instructor/researcher provided some guidelines for possible themes (such as key events in your life including influence of family, culture, and religion on personal

perspectives, hopes/aspirations, failures/successes, painful and enjoyable moments, union and separation) to be included in the paper and student were allowed to add their own dimensions into it. Students had the choice of inclusion, omission, or deletion of any of their personal experiences at any point in the research. The degree of candidness was left open to individual choice and decisions. The autobiographies were submitted to the researcher for review. The autobiographies were reviewed by the researcher for detail, comprehensiveness, and reflections/clarifications (if any).

Phase 11: During the second phase, students interviewed a "first-generation immigrant" (the term is operationalized before). The interview focused on themes included in students' autobiographies as well as the person's experiences in America and his/ her own country and his/her perception of America. The interview was auiotaped and transcribed by the students. The audiotapes were submitted to the researcher for review. Interviewees also read their biographies to ensure accuracy in the presented information and interpretations. Written permission was sought from the interviewees to use this information for the class as well as research purposes including the assurance to maintain anonymity. The biographies were submitted to the researcher for review. The review was based on the criteria of comprehensiveness, detail, and clarifications. After the review by the researcher/instructor, if required students contacted their interviewee to prepare the final draft of the person's biography.

Phase 111: At the final phase, students compared and analyzed their own autobiography with their interviewee's biography to write the commonalities and differences in their own and their interviewee's life experiences, challenges faced by new immigrants, and their understanding of another perspective. The paper also included their visualizations of ways to utilize this cross-cultural learning in their future career and life. They submitted all of their writings to the instructor. While analyzing the data, the researcher contacted individual students for further clarifications whenever there was a need. The project continued for the whole semester.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the limitations of the study. The sample studied was not representative of the national preservice teachers since the sample was drawn purposively from one course offered in a rural university. The long-term impact of the study and transfer of student learning to other contexts can not be inferred in the absence of follow-up studies. Moreover, the impact of the project on students' learning is inconclusive without the knowledge of other life and academic experiences of the participants such as courses taken during that period and engagements in cross-cultural experiences outside the class. The impact of the course content and procedures such as discussion on cross-cultural understanding; understanding of prejudice and discrimination against different minority groups; discussion with international students, listening to minority scholars (invited by the university);

reflection/discussion on videos dealing with variety of issues related to cultural minorities may have influenced the findings of the study. However, the positive findings from this study may contribute to the growing research base of the field.

Data Analysis

The data analysis could be described as a process of inductive reasoning (Goertz & LeCompte, 1981). The data was collected which focused on the inquiry under consideration. Yet, there were no predetermined categories to which the data needed to be matched. Bogdan & Biklen's (1994) "constant comparison" method was used to conduct textual analysis of each individual student's written autobiography, biography, and cross-cultural analysis. Major categories were developed from this process. Needless to mention that many unique themes emerged. However, only typical themes are reported in this study.

The major themes of data analysis were: (a) discovered one's own cultural lenses, (b) discovered similarities in human experiences, (c) discovered and respected cultural differences (d) understood the problems faced by new immigrants, (e) empathized with immigrants' problems: (f) What I learned?
(e) visualized the importance of cross-cultural understanding in making connection with first-generation immigrants (children and families).

(a) Discovered one's own cultural lens: One of the objectives of this project was to enable white students to realize that they belong to a culture and that their positionality within the culture of their family and race shapes many of their

perceptions and practices in life. Vickey, a 22 year old white female's autobiography reveals her understanding of the influences of religion on her family's beliefs about family and marital values.

> Religion has played an important part of my life also. My family went to church every Sunday. and they made me take classes in Christianity that the church offered. As I look back at this experience, I am glad that I took those classes. Not only because I learned about God and religion in general, but because it strengthened my faith and belief about many aspects of life.... My parents believe in strong family values and commitment to one's family. They have been married for over twenty-five years.... Their bond has made me believe in everlasting love to one individual. Some individuals in today' society have been married often.... I personally do not believe in this. (Vickey)

Emily's autobiography tells the influence of the biracial heritage on her outlook toward the concept of racial identity.

> Growing up in a world where the first thing you are judged on is the color of your skin, being biracial puts you at a more disadvantage than being of any one race....I get so frustrated that people assume that the color of your skin tells who you are. To some, skin color is like an advertisement.... I am the product of an interracial marriage. I see nothing wrong with interracial dating. I have dated the same white man for three years. In those three years, we both have come in contact with people who felt that it is wrong for us to be together....the world we

live in is so full of hatred that I am afraid of being an innocent child into it. (Emily)

b) Discovered similarities in human experiences: Students discovered how commonalities of experiences connect people of different cultures in spite of the barriers of language and other cultural traditions. Rebecca established that human bond while interviewing Pamella, a first generation immigrant from Germany. They both broke down in tears while sharing the death of their beloved persons which changed the path of their lives.

> I never thought that people were similar around the world. I also thought it would be hard to ask questions to someone that didn't speak my language fluently. This was no hard for us though. She also thought it would be hard because I spoke so fast. We both had a devastating death in the family that changed us. We both have grieved, mourned, and tried to get on with life. However, we both have realized that it is hard to get over with something like that.... I found that we can relate if we look further than just the outside of someone. (Rebecca)

The problem of "fitting in" into the American public school system is much harder for children who have recently immigrated to the U. S. as compared to other cultural groups who have been in the country for a longer period of time. Because of their unfamiliar cultural practices and poor language skills, they suffer rejection in the hands of their peers and teachers. Dijah's interviewee Maria's brother Temo is a case

in point. Even after four years of staying in the U. S. , Temo still has not mastered English. He has suffered humiliation in the hands of some of his American peers. Therefore, he prefers to spend time with other Mexican teenagers. Dijah connects Temo's non-acceptance by his American peers to her own high school experiences even if language or culture was not a barrier in her case.

> It is amazing to me how much things from childhood influences who a person becomes. I was thrown into the public school system after nine years in a private school. I knew no one. I tried very hard to fit in, but I never really succeeded....I was not accepted totally. Most of my friends seemed more like good acquaintances than anything else. (Dijah)

Empathizing with her interviewee's loneliness, Tammy writes:

> I can relate to him. My family moved from a large urban city in west coast to this small town when I was in high school. In the beginning, I felt as if I was in another country. I had a hard time with friends in my school. Like him, I was "strange" to other teenagers and my classmates were just mean. If they would have taken time and got to know me then they would realize that I was not that bad of a person. I found that I did spend alone and I feel that is a reason why I still have a difficult time meeting and making friends. (Tammy)

C: Discovered and respected cultural differences: Students also discovered cultural differences. Sometimes they struggled between whose view is better and at other times they wished that they had not lost some of their own cultural

traditions in a fast-paced individualistic society. The writings of Ann and Joy portray their learning of differences in cultural traditions and philosophies.

> Another difference between us is the concept of "freedom." Risa expressed an unbelievable awe of how American women make all their decisions and create their own experiences. Risa feels that she has gained more day to day personal freedom after coming to this country, yet overall her actions and decisions are closely guided by her family. Family interest and happiness comes before her own interest. It sounded strange to me, yet I realized that both of us grew up knowing only our ways. I do not know whose way is better. Yet, this interview provided us an opportunity to understand and interpret each other's practices and point of views. (Ann)

> We talked about the arranged marriage system in Sri Lanka. Sunita's parents' marriage was arranged. Sunita said that her parents are very happy and the family is very close. Sunita seems to be very comfortable with that concept. According to her, arranged marriage system has been very successful in her country. I still have hard time accepting the concept of arranged marriage. Yet, I wish that majority of children in America could enjoy a stable home and family. As a child, I have gone through the trauma of parental divorce. (Joy)

Almost all the students have probed into the influence of "family" in their interviewees' lives. Invariably, they admitted that "family" seemed to have played a

major role in their interviewee's life. Some connected it to a similar family experiences of their own, some others wished for stability in American families, and others rationalized this particular cultural difference from the viewpoint of the fast-paced life style of Americans. Jodi writes:

> Felipa said that families were very important in the Colombian's life. Every weekend they would go to the grandfather's farm and get together.... My family is important to me, but life is so busy that I do not take time to visit or call them. This is one thing I do miss is the contact with my family. (Jodi)

> .... I celebrate Christmas at five different houses each year. There is not enough time for the family members to decorate the tree or set up the nativity. Mostly we are there to eat, open gifts and leave. Which is very sad. I wish that Americans could slow down and see what we are missing. (Kim)

Another theme that dominated students' writing of cultural differences is the sense of "respect for elders" in their interviewee's cultures.

> The elders are considered very important to the families. The parents and grandparents cannot be called by their first names by children. It is considered disrespectful. They also are to be taken care of in their later lives. It is believed that in order to be taken care of in your later life that you must take care of your elders....I realized how different this was than in our own country where our elders are not nearly as respected and cared for as theirs are. (Megan)

(D) Understood the problems faced by new immigrants: Most of the students realized the discrimination and stereotyped attitudes their interviewees have experienced in this country. They discovered and interpreted the reasons for the immigrants' problems. Sometimes ignorance and cultural supremacy attitude of Americans pose a problem for immigrants. Some other times language barrier poses a problem "for fear of not being able to understand them" (Kristin). Frequently, the anti-immigrant movement in the country adds to people's perception of these newly immigrants as "threats to the economic interest of the country" (Jeremmy). The themes of interracial marriage, difference in cultural traditions including religion also surfaced in students' writings. Jodi's biography of Felipa portrays the ignorance and negative attitude some Americans have about people coming from other countries.

> Felipa said that he missed the friendliness of his country... No one is friendly and says "hi,".... He feels very discriminated against here. Some teenagers asked him about Colombia and their feelings about Colombia was that they live in the trees, they do not have cars, and they live in primitive ways. He tried to give him a real picture of his country but he could not change their attitude about Colombia. He is having a hard time at school. (Jodi)

Jolene's biography of Tracey captures the poignant experiences of Stacy, a White English Female who dared to cross the so called "racial borders" and violate the notion of "racial purity" by marrying an African-American male. As a new immigrant, Stacy suffered isolation in the work place and in the community where she lived. When she

had almost given up on finding a friend, she met Carl, her husband. Jolene writes:

> I learned a lot about Tracey, my interviewee from England. Tracey is married to an African-American man, and sadly some of our co-workers had shunned her because of it....Her marriage is a good one. The only difficulty they experience is his family's inability to accept her. Her husband Tony is from Alabama. When he told his family he was dating a white woman, they were happy for him. But when he told them that he was going to marry her, it brought a whole new attitude. Tracey feels so uncomfortable around her in-laws, that she gave up a family vacation so that Tony could take her boys to see his family in Alabama. Tracey told me that she could not go anywhere with her husband or her children without being stared at, or people making rude noises at them. She almost fears for her safety, and the safety of her children when she is in Alabama. (Jolene)

Anne's biography of Betsy, a Muslim Indonesian girl reveals feelings of religious minorities in a Christian dominated society.

> Betsy is of Islamic faith and is completely dedicated to her religion. She finds it more difficult to follow her faith here simply because of the way she is treated by those who do not understand it. She is surprised to find how much mis-information some people have about Islam and their stereotypical attitudes towards people who follow Islam.

(E) Empathized with immigrants' problems: Majority of the students seemed to be able to empathize with their interviewees. They not only understood the immigrants' problems but connected it to their own privileged experiences. Anita's biography of Wang portrays the life and experiences of orphan children adopted by American parents.

> Wang came over here from Vietnam when she was about 13 or 14 years old. She was put in an orphanage when she was about a year old. She was forced from her mother because of her physical illness and her father was killed. She lived in the orphanage until she was adopted by an American family. Things did not work out too well between them and Wang was again put in a foster care.... finally she was adopted by my parents. She likes having a family now and had adjusted quite well. I know it was hard for her at first. She did not know how to act in a family or what a family is all about. She had to learn as she went along.... Moreover, her impression of a family of families are different than what families are like here. So, she had hard time making adjustment as well. Living in an orphanage for so long had made Wang not to put faith in people. All her life she had people come and go. She would make friends in the orphanage and they would be adopted. She would take care of little babies in the orphanage and some would die. This caused Wang not to get attached to anyone. Even in America she was thrown out of homes. She thought she was never going to find a family or anyone that wanted her. (Anita).... life was different for her than it

was for me. She had to learn what a family is al about while for me there was no learning required.....I had the privilege of a secure and comfortable home. (Anita)

(F) What I learned?: Students' learning from the project were divided into different themes.

Overcoming fears of non-communication: Invariably, all the students admitted of overcoming the barriers of communication with their interviewees. Here is an excerpt from Ann's writings.

I must admit that when this assignment was given, I was extremely nervous about talking with someone from such a culturally different background.... In the end I found this assignment to be very rewarding. I interviewed Risa, a nineteen year old from Jakarta. I think in the beginning, my fear was basically of the unknown. I knew nothing of Risa's culture, what her experiences were, how she felt about things.... What I forgot in my misplaced fear, was that Risa does not know anything about me either. The chasm as quickly overcome when we began our interview sessions.... I was even surprised to find that language was not a barrier. If either one of us id not understand, we would ask again or reword the statement until we understood each other. What I was anticipating as a bad experience was actually an honor and a privilege and enjoyable. (Ann)

This project helped me in many ways. I realized that people who live in different countries are really more like we are than what we think. ...I learned not to fear people

that I do not know and different lifestyles. I ave learned to better appreciate other cultures and learn to be patient with people from other cultures. (Marian)

Strengthening personal beliefs: For some students who had a positive attitude toward diversity, the project allowed them an opportunity to strengthen their personal beliefs.

> I will be the only person in my immediate family to graduate from a university with a degree....My family has played a big role in how I look at the world and the people within it. My family tends to be biased towards others and that has made me determined not to do like that. I have learned not to judge people just from one experience I had with someone from a certain race. My family does not see it that way. They tend to group people as a whole. ...:.I have my own beliefs on certain issues based on my knowledge rather than what my parents or families have told me. This project strengthened my beliefs. (Brad)

> I found this project to be very interesting. I think that this experience will help me appreciate students from other countries more. Instead of viewing them as someone completely different from me, I will try to seek out the commonalities between us in the beginning. I think that this is the problem with the American society in accepting people from other cultures and other countries. Instead of finding similarities between themselves, they automatically assume that they are nothing alike and they would never be able to understand each other....that

my lifestyles and perceptions would be so different compared to those of someone from another country. (Deana)

Future teaching ideas: Students visualized strategies to use in their classrooms and with immigrant parents. Connecting with children and parents from other cultures, exposing white children to cultures of new immigrants through unit/lessons on friendships, common festivals, writing of autobiographies/biographies, and strategies to involve parents were mentioned by students.

This interview has helped me at a personal level. For the first time in my life, I got a friend from another culture. I would include a unit on friendship....the children should learn ways to make friends with people from other cultures and adopt problem solving techniques for when they are in a disagreement. (Jodi)

This will help me in my classroom because I will not assume that I understand a student or his/her family situation. Instead, I will take the time to get to know them. (Ann)

I would have my students do interviews with their peers from other cultures. I would repeat this project with my elementary students. They will write autobiographies and biographies. (Joseph)

I will bring first generation immigrant parents to my class and let my students interview them to learn about their culture to listen to the problems they faced in

America. (Jeremmy)

I realized that our children need to know about real people and their views, not the stereotypes that they have been exposed to. We, teachers owe it to our students. (Nina)

Discussions and Implications

Consistent with findings of other researchers (Duff, Brown & Van Scoy, 1995; Solas, 1992; Parsons & Matson, 1995), the findings of this study reiterate the importance of autobiography on participants' cultural understanding. The findings of the study are consistent with Schmidt's (1996) study using ABC to further cross-cultural learning of education students. Participants in this study used their own "personal constructs" (according to Kelly, 1955, "personal constructs" are constructed from one's own experiences and which in turn becomes a catalyst in creating new experiences and verifying and modifying other experiences) to interpret their interviewee's experiences. In a way, they deconstructed their own life experiences by exploring their own cultural lenses that determine their individual autobiographies and realizing the taken-for granted privileges that they enjoy being members of the majority group. The context of writing autobiography/ biography allowed students to step out of their social and cultural roles/contexts to critically analyze those roles/contexts (Marinara, 1992).

All of them received a first hand information of new immigrants' perspectives and problems. To gain a cross-cultural perspective, one's own life history (autobiography) becomes more meaningful when connected to a culturally different person's history (biography). When autobiography became a context as well as medium to write and interpret biography of a culturally different person, its importance became multifold as was evident in this particular study. Sometimes one's own historical landscape converged with that of the other as a result of perception of commonalities and some other times it diverged with the understandings that different life styles and ways of life are natural and normal for human beings. Interestingly, there were times participants stood between these two landscapes unable to decide which one is better or even preferred one over the other.

Fostering a positive attitude/belief toward diversity in preservice teachers has been recognized as an important step in achieving "critical multiculturalism" (Houser and Chevallier, 1996; Moore, 1996; Vavrus & Ozcan, 1996). Researchers report the crucial role of cross-cultural exposure in this regard (Aaronshon, Howell & Carter, 1993). In this study, cross-cultural exposure was alleviated to a level which was personal, interactive, and experiential. Hopefully, this experience will be more enduring and enlightening than that of occasional field trip (s) to an ethnically diverse school or neighborhood where the "other" still remains distant from self.

Moreover, in the context of this particular study, the strategy "ABC" exhibited far-reaching implications. It moved participants beyond the past and present to

visualize and construct the future experiences for their personal and professional lives. It also moved them beyond the individual to the social and institutional which are the goals of critical multiculturalism (Vavrus &Ozcan, 1996) and the criteria of Banks' (1994) transformative and social action levels (the highest stages of multicultural curriculum).

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher recommends the following research goals.

- Conducting a follow-up study with those preservice teachers who have participated in the ABC and who volunteered to apply ABC (autobiography/ biography/cross-cultural analysis) with their own elementary students.
- Exploring long-term impact of this study on the participants after they join the teaching force.
- Exploring the effects of exposure/participation in cultural pluralism courses on the quality of cultural analyses produced by students. This can be approached through a comparative analysis of ABC's written by two groups of students, students who have taken or taking courses on culturally pluralism and those who did not have that experience.

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